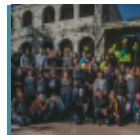


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The Spirit of the King David Hotel

In the 60 years since the attack at the King David Hotel, Israel has hurt some two million civilians, including 750,000 who lost their homes in 1948 and another quarter million Palestinians who were forced to

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the Six-Day War.

Tom Segev | Jul 23, 2006 12:00 AM



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The terror attack on the King David Hotel in Jerusalem was in its day the equivalent of the Twin Towers; yesterday was its 60th anniversary.

There are two historic plaques at the hotel, one of whose wings was used by the British Mandate authority.

On one of the plaques, which has been hanging there for some time, a few words note the terror attack: "On July 22, 1946, the Etzel underground bombed the southern wing." The action is attributed to Etzel alone, but there is no condemnation.

"Underground" generally has a positive connotation.

The unveiling of the other plaque this

cap an academic conference held at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center on the issue of who is a

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freedom fighter and who is a terrorist. It was quite a week to clarify such a question. They can be distinguished by organizational affiliation, goals, targets, means of combat and mode of operation. They all assume that a freedom fighter is a good person and a terrorist is a bad one. Nearly every terrorist defines himself as a freedom fighter, and vice versa: freedom fighters are usually defined as terrorists. So was Begin. He invested a lot of effort to convince history that he was not a terrorist. Among other things, he emphasized that his organization did not harm civilians. There's a thesis that could serve as an historic lesson from a moral standpoint: not harming

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The new plaque identifies the perpetrators of the attack as "Etzel

fighters." It's important for them to emphasize that they acted "under orders from the Hebrew rebel movement," in other words, the Hagannah, among others. They called the hotel switchboard, the editorial offices of the Palestine Post, and the French Embassy (presumably they meant the consulate) "to prevent casualties." In other words, they sought a terrorist attack without casualties, but something went wrong. Twenty-five minutes went by and then "for some reason" the British did not evacuate the building "and as a result" 91 people were "regrettably" killed. There were 28 British, 41 Arabs, 17 Jews and five others.

To emphasize the

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operation, the plaque notes that one of the Etzel people was killed "in an

exchange of fire."

The British government is demanding the plaque's removal. Her Majesty's ambassador and the consul have written to the mayor of Jerusalem that such an act of terror cannot be honored, even if it was preceded by a warning. To this day, it is not clear what made the bombing's planners believe the British would evacuate the building. Would Benjamin Netanyahu, as prime minister, have ordered his bureau evacuated on the basis of telephone threat from a Palestinian terror group?

Netanyahu spoke at the conference. The difference between a terrorist operation

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military action is expressed, he said, in the fact that the terrorists intend to

harm civilians
whereas legitimate
combatants try to
avoid that. According
to that theory, the
kidnapping of an
Israeli soldier by a
Palestinian
organization is a
legitimate military
operation, and the
bombing of Dresden,
Hanoi, Haifa or
Beirut is a war crime.
Of course this is not
what Netanyahu
meant. He learned
only this from the
bombing of the hotel:
that the Arabs are
bad and we are good.
Arab actions starting
in 1920 and through
the Iranian nuclear
plan reflect, in his
words, "a terrorist
mentality." Israel, on
the other hand, only
harms civilians by
accident or when
there is no
alternative. For
example, when
terrorists hide among
civilians.

THE HISTORIC TRUTH IS
different: In the 60
years since the attack
at the King David
Hotel, Israel has hurt

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some two million civilians, including 750,000 who lost their homes in 1948, another quarter million Palestinians who were forced to leave the West Bank in the Six-Day War and hundreds of thousands of Egyptian civilians who were expelled from the cities along the Suez Canal during the War of Attrition. And now tens of thousands of Lebanese villagers are being forced to abandon their homes, and air force pilots are once again bombing Beirut and other cities. Hundreds of civilians have been killed. Regrettably. It's all in the spirit of the King David Hotel. One can always say there was a mishap.

**Tom**

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